



VOICES ADFOCAD SENEDD ELECTION 2026 BRIEFING AND MANIFESTO

Unpaid Carers' Rights in Wales

Unpaid and Young carers in Wales have a number of **statutory rights** under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**, many of which are set out in the *Charter for Unpaid Carers*.

Key rights include:

- 1. Right to Well-being**
Local authorities, health boards, and the Welsh Government must actively promote carers' well-being, not just focus on the person being cared for.
- 2. Right to Information, Advice, and Assistance (IAA)**
Carers are entitled to clear, accessible information about available support, how to access it, and their options and these should be provided in a way that meets linguistic needs (including Welsh).
- 3. Right to a Carer's Needs Assessment**
Local authorities must offer carers a separate assessment of *their* needs (not just the needs of the person they care for), regardless of the carer's income.
- 4. Right to Be Heard and Have Control**
During assessments, carers should be asked "what matters" to them. They must be involved in decision-making about their support.
- 5. Right to Advocacy**
If a carer cannot fully take part in discussions, they are entitled to an advocate to represent their interests.
- 6. Right to Direct Payments**
Where local authorities agree, carers can receive direct payments to purchase services that help them, giving them more choice and control.
- 7. Rights Around Hospital Discharge**
Carers should be identified early, consulted, and supported when the person they care for is being discharged.
- 8. New Employment Leave Rights**
Thanks to the **Carers Leave Act 2023**, from April 2024 carers in **Wales (and the rest of Great Britain)** have the right to take **up to one week's unpaid leave per year** to provide or arrange care.

Where Welsh Government and Local Authorities Need to Do Better

Despite these rights, there are important gaps between policy and reality. Some of the areas that need improvement:

- 1. Low Uptake and Poor Awareness**
 - According to Carers UK, many carers don't get their rights in practice: only **6%** accessed a needs assessment in one survey, despite it being a legal entitlement.

- Information and advice is not always reaching carers: as of recent reporting, fewer than half got relevant advice, and even fewer received it when needed.
 - Local authorities must do more to proactively identify carers early. Delayed recognition (sometimes years) undermines early intervention.
2. **Inequities in Support and “Postcode Lottery”**
- The *Charter* enshrines a vision of **community-based preventative support** and early intervention, but in practice support varies sharply between different Welsh local authorities.
 - Some carers struggle to access short breaks or respite even though there is national funding (Short Breaks Scheme).
3. **Carer Assessment Delays and Quality Issues**
- A significant proportion Carers report either never receiving a copy of their assessment to check before it is finalised and where they do, many report inaccuracies and a lack of relevance to the discussions that initially took place during the assessment (GDPR).
 - Many unpaid carers are also reporting that they are being told they are not entitled to a needs assessment and are only receiving Information, Advice and Assistance. Many who receive IAA also report the information provided to be unsuitable, such as being told to watch a video on YouTube.
 - When assessments do happen, they may be superficial, or conducted with staff who lack training in the Act’s requirements.
 - Waiting times can be very long (Carers UK has reported waiting of many weeks / months).
 - There’s insufficient follow-through: local authorities may assess but then not fully meet eligible needs.
 - Clarity of Carers entitlement to reasonable adjustments and Direct Payments
 - Uphold the principals of GDPR by allowing carers access to their own information and allowing them to co-produce the final assessment before it is signed off by a Social Work Manager.
4. **Advocacy and Participation**
- The legal right to advocacy is important, but many carers don’t know about it or cannot access an advocate.
 - Some carers report asking to bring along an informal advocate (friend/family member) but are actively discouraged from doing so.
 - Carers are not consistently included in **co-production** of services. The *Charter* calls for carers to be equal partners in designing policy / services, but carers report limited involvement in strategy or service design.
 - Many carers report not being given their entitlement to reasonable adjustments to them to fully participate.
5. **Sustainable Funding**
- Welsh Government has committed funding (e.g., in its 2025-2026 budget: £3.5m for short breaks, £1.75m for the Carers Support Fund).
 - Long-term stability remains a concern. Short-term or project-based funding may make it hard to sustain services, especially preventative and community-based ones.
 - When examined this funding only reaches 10% (approx) of the Welsh caring population and does not resolve the ongoing challenges faced by unpaid carers.
6. **Language and Accessibility**

- While the *Charter* makes an “active offer” of Welsh language services mandatory, in practice carers report variable access to support in Welsh.
- Information, advice, and assessments must be culturally sensitive and accessible, but some carers (young carers, minority language speakers) may still fall through the cracks.
- Many carers report not being given their entitlement to reasonable adjustments to them to fully participate.

7. Employment, Education and Economic Strain

- Even with carers leave, unpaid carers often face economic hardship: caring responsibilities can limit work, reduces income during a cost-of-living crisis whilst expenditure increases, and increases stress and isolation.
- There may be insufficient support to help carers balance work, caring, and training, especially in long-term strategic planning.
- Despite contributing £10.8 Billion to the Welsh economy per year by bridging the gaps within health and social care the majority of unpaid carers are living in poverty with a percentage of those being in deep poverty. Approximately 70% of carers are also reporting having to spend their own money to cover the costs of caring for a loved one.
- Young Carers report facing challenges and a lack of support when accessing education at all levels and this needs to be improved.

What Needs to Be Done: Recommendations

To better support unpaid carers in Wales, the Welsh Government and local authorities should consider the following:

1. Raise Awareness and Early Identification

- Run a sustained, well-resourced awareness campaign so carers know their rights (IAA, assessment, advocacy).
- Ensure health and social care workers are trained to identify carers early (e.g., at GP surgeries, hospital admission, community services).
- Use data and outreach to proactively reach “hidden carers” (those not yet known or registering with services).

2. Strengthen Carer Assessments

- Reduce waiting times for carers’ assessments, set clear targets for local authorities.
- Standardise assessment quality by training staff, monitoring compliance with statutory codes of practice.
- Ensure assessments explore all aspects of the carer’s life (employment, education, mental health, future planning).
- Ensure ownership, voice and control

3. Ensure Equitable Access to Breaks and Respite

- Expand and make consistent the Short Breaks Scheme across Wales, ensuring all local authorities deliver high-quality, flexible respite.

- Promote creative, community-based respite (peer support, day activities, micro-respite) as well as traditional care-based breaks.
 - Ensure young carers have access to peer groups and activities outside of school to provide them with respite and a life alongside caring
- 4. Ensure past, present and future unpaid carers**
- have access to peer groups and activities outside of school/work/their caring responsibilities to provide them with respite and a life alongside caring
 - have access and support to attend their own medical appointments
 - have enough financial support to cover the additional costs of caring, food and household bills
 - have access to meaningful and person-centred support when their caring roles come to an end
- 5. Guarantee Advocacy and Participation**
- Fund and promote independent advocates for carers, especially for those who struggle to represent themselves.
 - Embed unpaid carers in all levels of policymaking: from local authority planning to health board strategies, and Welsh Government advisory groups.
 - Ensure all carers are given their full entitlement to reasonable adjustments to allow them to fully exercise their voice and control.
- 6. Sustain and Expand Funding**
- Move from short-term project funding to multi-year, core funding for carers' services so organisations can plan long term.
 - Increase the resilience of the Carers Support Fund and similar mechanisms.
 - Ensure local authority budgets explicitly value carers' support when planning social care spending.
- 7. Language and Accessibility**
- Enforce the "active offer" of Welsh language services in assessment, advice, and support: make this visible, and monitor compliance.
 - Provide accessible information in multiple formats (online, paper, video, BSL) tailored to different carers (young carers, older carers, etc.).
 - Ensure all carers are given their full entitlement to reasonable adjustments to allow them to fully participate in all aspects of their caring life.
- 8. Work, Training, Education and Economic Support**
- Support employers in Wales to understand carers' rights (e.g., Carers Leave Act) and create carer-friendly workplace policies.
 - Provide tailored training and employment support for carers who want to work or retrain, recognizing their caring responsibilities.
 - Explore financial support mechanisms (beyond the Carers Support Fund) to mitigate the economic burden of caring.
 - Ensure Young Carers are supported to access education and that where possible reasonable adjustments are made to ensure they can continue to access education without prejudice.
- 9. Monitoring, Accountability, and Evaluation**
- Regularly evaluate how well rights (assessment, IAA, break provision) are being delivered across Wales.
 - Publish transparent data on take-up, unmet needs, waiting times, and carers' satisfaction.

- Hold local authorities to account; introduce performance targets and reporting around carers' support and service delivery.
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Conclusion

Unpaid and Young carers are the backbone of social care in Wales: they provide invaluable support, often at personal cost. While Welsh law gives carers strong rights, there remains a “gap – between what is legally guaranteed and what carers actually experience.”

To close that gap, Welsh Government and local authorities must move from rhetoric to **action**: investing in identification, assessments, breaks, advocacy, and the long-term sustainability of support. Only then can unpaid carers truly have the rights they are due and the support they deserve.

[Charter for unpaid carers](#)

[Social Services and Wellbeing Act \(Easy Read\)](#)

Footnote: When we speak of unpaid carers throughout this document it encompasses both Adult and Young Carers.

Strengthening Rights and Support for Unpaid Carers in Wales

Executive Summary

Unpaid carers are pivotal to the sustainability of health and social care in Wales, and despite having strong legal rights under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**, there are still extensive gaps in identification, recognition, assessment protocols, respite, direct payments, financial support, and meaningful involvement (true co-production) in service planning. This brief sets out priority actions for the **Welsh Government, local authorities and other key organisations** to ensure carers' rights are delivered with due regard, consistency and accountability across Wales.

1. Context: Why Action Is Needed

- Wales relies heavily on unpaid carers to support older people, disabled people, and those with long-term conditions.
 - Carers often face financial strain, declining health, and work–care conflict.
 - Although Wales has a strong legislative framework, delivery is inconsistent, and awareness remains low.
 - Improving support for unpaid carers aligns with key Welsh Government priorities: prevention, early intervention, well-being, co-production, and sustainability of health and social care.
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2. Key Challenges

A. Low Awareness of Rights

Many carers are unaware of their entitlement to Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA), Carers Assessments, advocacy, and direct payments.

B. Inconsistent Delivery – the “postcode lottery”

Access to assessments, respite, community support, and breaks varies widely by local authority.

C. Long Assessment Delays and Variable Quality

Some carers wait months for a Carer's Needs Assessment, and assessments often fail to fully explore carers' well-being, employment, mental health, or future plans. Furthermore, the quality of assessments and the voice and control within these processes varies extensively across Wales.

D. Limited Access to Respite and Short Breaks

Despite specific funding streams, carers still report difficulty accessing flexible, meaningful breaks which meet their ongoing needs.

E. Weak Implementation of the Welsh Language “Active Offer”

Carers who prefer Welsh support are not always offered bilingual services at the point of need.

F. Under-recognition of Economic and Employment Barriers

Caring responsibilities impact income, career progression, and mental well-being, with insufficient structured support to meet existing and emerging need.

3. Priority Actions for the Welsh Government

1. Introduce a National Carer Awareness Campaign

- A sustained public campaign highlighting carers’ rights, how to access assessments, advocacy, respite, and financial support.
- Co-produce messaging with unpaid carers and carer organisations.

2. Establish National Standards for Carers Assessments

- Create a standard assessment model and guidance for all local authorities.
- The standard assessment model should collect data that is used to evaluate and account for the impact of services and support provided to unpaid carers.
- Regular publishing of data that is publicly available to all.
- Require mandatory training, clear timeframes, and consistent recording of outcomes.

3. Expand and Stabilise Funding for Breaks and Preventative Support

- Convert short-term funding pots (e.g., Carers Support Fund, Short Breaks Scheme) into multi-year, ring-fenced allocations.
- Ensure local authorities cannot divert funds to other pressures in social care.

4. Introduce National Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

- Require local authorities to publish annual reports on:
 - number of carers identified
 - assessment waiting times
 - unmet needs
 - access to breaks and outcomes
- Publish the data to drive improvement and transparency.

5. Strengthen Workforce Training

- Mandate enhanced training for social workers, hospital discharge teams, and primary care on carers' rights, early identification and reasonable adjustments
- Include the Welsh Language Standards and “active offer” as core components.

6. Improve Employment Support for Carers

- Encourage employers across Wales to adopt “carer-friendly” policies.
 - Promote take-up of leave entitlements and flexible working.
 - Fund pilot schemes supporting carers who wish to return to or remain in work.
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4. Priority Actions for Local Authorities

1. Identify Carers Early and Proactively

- Train frontline staff in health, social care, education, and community services to recognise and record caring roles.
- Build links with GPs, schools, hospitals, and community organisations.

2. Reduce Waiting Times and Improve Assessment Quality

- Set local maximum waiting times.
- Ensure assessments are person-centred, accessible, strengths-based, and focus on “what matters” to the carer.
- Provide advocates automatically when carers face communication or participation barriers and allow for informal support where carers request this.

3. Deliver Flexible, Accessible Respite and Breaks

- Offer a range of break types, including micro-respite, community activities, sitting services, direct payments, and residential options.
- Ensure breaks are culturally appropriate, bilingual where needed, and shaped by carers themselves.

4. Ensure Unpaid Carers Past, Present and Future

- have access to peer groups and activities outside of school/work/their caring responsibilities to provide them with respite and a life alongside caring that recognises the need to reimburse out of pocket expenses.
- have access and support to attend their own medical appointments
- have enough financial support to cover the additional costs of caring, food and household bills
- have access to meaningful and person-centred support when their caring roles come to an end

5. Co-Produce Carer Services and Strategies

- Establish standing carer led advisory panels.
- Engage carers meaningfully in strategy development, service redesign, and commissioning decisions that do not leave the carer out of pocket.

6. Improve Access to Welsh-Medium Support

- Embed the Welsh Language “active offer” in carer assessments, respite services, advice, and communications.
- Audit local provision and address gaps.

5. The Case for Investment

Strengthening support for unpaid carers is **not only a moral imperative**—it is fundamental to the long-term viability of health and social care in Wales.

Improved carer support leads to:

- reduced carer burnout
- reduced crisis admissions
- more stable care at home
- more sustainable use of social care resources
- better long-term health outcomes for both carers and cared-for people
- improved socio-economic outcomes

Every pound invested in preventative carers’ support saves significantly more in emergency health and social care costs.

6. Conclusions

Wales has strong legislation that recognises unpaid carers as equal partners in care. The challenge now is **delivery**. By improving assessment processes, investing in breaks, raising awareness, ensuring consistent national standards, and embedding co-production, Welsh Government and local authorities can ensure that carers' rights are not just theoretical—but a lived reality that embraces the living reality of unpaid care.

Unpaid carers keep families together, sustain communities, and uphold the health and social care system. They deserve a system that recognises, values, and supports them.

[Charter for unpaid carers](#)

[Social Services and Wellbeing Act \(Easy Read\)](#)

Footnote: When we speak of unpaid carers throughout this document it encompasses both Adult and Young Carers.

VOICES ADFOCAD Manifesto for Unpaid Carers in Wales

Recognising, Valuing, and Empowering Those Who Care

Unpaid carers are the backbone of Wales' health and social care system. They keep families together, sustain communities, and uphold the dignity of those who need support. Yet too often, their rights remain theoretical, their voices unheard, and their needs unmet. This must change.

We ask for a future where unpaid carers are recognised as equal partners in care, where their rights are not optional, but guaranteed; where support is not patchy, but universal; and where caring does not mean sacrificing health, income, or hope.

Our Vision

A Wales where every unpaid carer:

- Knows their rights and can access them without barriers.
 - Receives timely, high-quality assessments and meaningful support.
 - Has access to respite, financial security, and opportunities for work and well-being.
 - Is treated with dignity, respect, and equality always.
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Our Asks

1. End the Postcode Lottery

Set **national standards** for carer assessments, ensuring consistency, fairness, and accountability across Wales.

2. Make Rights Visible

Launch a **national awareness campaign** so every carer knows their entitlements to information, advice, advocacy, respite, and financial support.

3. Guarantee Real Support

Ring-fence **funding** for breaks and preventative services, making respite a reality, not a privilege.

4. Demand Accountability

Require **annual public reporting** on carer identification, assessment times, unmet needs, and outcomes—because transparency drives change.

5. Train and Transform

Equip **the workforce** with mandatory training on carers' rights, early identification, and the Welsh Language “active offer.”

6. Protect Carers' Futures

Carer-friendly employment policies, flexible working, and pilot schemes to help carers stay in or return to work and/or education.

Local Action

Local authorities must:

- Identify carers early and proactively.
 - Deliver person-centred, timely assessments.
 - Provide flexible, culturally appropriate respite.
 - Embed co-production in every strategy and service.
 - Ensure Welsh-medium support is available everywhere.
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Why It Matters

Investing in carers is not charity, it is **essential for Wales' future**. Every pound spent on preventative support saves far more in crisis care. Stronger support means:

- Reduced burnout.
 - Fewer emergency admissions.
 - More stable care at home.
 - Better health and socio-economic outcomes for all.
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Our Call to Action

Unpaid carers deserve more than words, they deserve action. Together, we can build a Wales that **recognises, values, and supports those who care**. This is our ask. This is our manifesto.